

Appendix A to the Council Minutes – 22 September 2021

Item 6 – Questions from Public

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 2 questions had been received.

1. From Mr Perrin to Councillor Jefferies

Mr Perrin

Can you confirm that it is a Council rule that tenants/residents must remove refuse bins “wheelie bins” after being emptied from public areas e.g. pavements?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Mr Perrin. To ensure the safety of pedestrians, wheelchair users and pushchairs we ask residents to remove bins from the pavement after collection and only represent prior to collection, it is really important that residents enable the free flow of pavements to assist in keeping our neighbourhoods safe.

All local authorities carrying out domestic waste collections are subject to the Environmental Protection Act. The removal of domestic wheeled-bins after collection falls within Section-46 of the Environmental Protection Act, which provides the Highways authority with consent for the placing of receptacles, for that purpose, on the highway.

As the ‘local’ Highways authority we are able to allow residents to use the public highway to present their bins to the kerbside, and we also have the ability to stipulate that bins must be removed from the public highway after the bins have been emptied.

Mayor

Mr Perrin would you like to pose a supplementary question.

Mr Perrin

Thank you Madam Mayor. This is not the first time that I have asked this question and been told that it is a council rule that refuse bins must be removed from public areas. There is very little evidence, if any, of the council enforcing this rule. In addition to the wheelie bins pedestrians have to contend with extra rubbish being dumped on the pavement such as discarded fridges, furniture and other sundry items too large for the bin. Pedestrians especially the elderly also have to contend with mobility scooters, battery powered scooters on cracked and uneven paving stones. In short some pavements are damn right dangerous and are a real threat to

the wellbeing and safety of all pedestrians. Councillor Jefferies will you take the appropriate action to ensure pavements are safe.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Mr Perrin for your supplementary question. It is one of those difficult situations Mr Perrin whereby the council do not actually have powers to prosecute people. It would be quite difficult to establish who had left their bin out whether it was deliberate or that the bin had been left out for collection so we don't actually have powers. I will have a look at this to see if there is something that we can do with our enforcement officers. What I would say to any resident if there is fly-tipping on the pavements to report it and it would be removed within 24 hours at the latest. I share your annoyance of people leaving bins out on the street longer than they should be and would urge all residents to take them back in so that the footpaths are kept clear. Any fly-tipping please report and it should be cleared within 24 hours.

2. From Mr Williams to Councillor Coxshall

Mr Williams

Councillor Coxshall, concerning the demolition of the Thameside Theatre Complex threat, we briefly note the following key facts: (i) The recently issued Property Agent's site sale particulars of the Titan Works for housing lists positive Grays facilities, London links, shopping, eateries etc and the new £10 million Council Offices over 900 yards away, yet glaringly excludes any mention of the Thameside Theatre Complex facility right beside the Titan Works indicating they appear to know it will be demolished if possible (ii) Your Highways Department has to accept that Titan Road, at current width of 25 feet kerb to kerb plus its footpath, is already a wide enough second vehicular access to serve the Titan Works pit in conjunction with its newer Hogg Lane access. Will you therefore confirm that the use of Titan Road as a second access to serve half of the approximately 700 possible homes development will not require the closure and demolition of the Thameside Complex in order to further widen Titan Road for that housing?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

You are misinformed. Thurrock Council has not received any planning applications for these sites in question. If the developer submits the highways officer would of course carry out a detailed assessment of the access to the site. What I can say is making 2 and 2 makes 6 is a bit disappointing. What the property agent say is I, myself, for Thurrock Council have no power over.

Mr Williams

I found it astonishing that there was no talk of CPO in the first shop unit of the west corner of Titan Road and must have realised the complex it would have been cheaper and quicker in that way. Given that Titan Road is the same width 26 feet which has successfully served the 300 plus houses in nearby Badgers Dene over the 30 years nevertheless has the Thameside Complex so far been the subject of any pre-apt development submissions, just the dates please and were those submissions assessments against any produced design brief covering that part of Grays town centre that either include a design brief solely for the Thameside Complex.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

Mr Williams did you not listen to the first answer before you have gave me the second question as I said no in the first answer. You are misinformed. There are no plans to link ever these sites and for Thurrock Council has seen, or myself, of any planning applications or designs that you are talking about. Please don't make things up. There is nothing. What do you want me to say? We haven't seen anything.

Item 14 – Questions from Members

The Mayor informed the Chamber that 2 questions to the Leader had been received and 10 questions to Cabinet Members.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

1. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Councillor J Kent

A recent judge-led tribunal says the public has a right to know the detail of how Thurrock Council borrowed and invested £1bn in taxpayers' money - so why is the Council spending even more public money trying to fight that decision?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. The decision to which you refer it was a partial and interim decision in dealing with only one aspect of the overall case, and at that time the Council had not been a direct party to the proceedings.

The council has supported an approach to investments over a significant number of years with unanimous support of the chamber. The requested information is of such detail that to provide it would seriously prejudice the council's ability to operate in the commercial market and this would therefore impact on the returns we can secure which benefit the council and directly support services for residents.

The council's approach was supported by the independent Information Commissioner and the tribunal recognised that the delicate balance which is needed to be considered when withholding information. On the aspect that the tribunal has looked at it has reached a decision balancing specific commercial interests against a formal public interest test. The tribunal itself recognised that there were significant other elements and issues in the case which it wanted to speak to the council's specific representations before issuing a final overall decision. The council is responding to that request and supporting the tribunal to be able to consider all the material elements in full.

This process, commenced on the request of the tribunal itself and undertaken in order to support the ongoing investment strategy that this council is pursuing, will get that information submission from us. It is worth noting that the Independent Information Commissioner continues to support the council's representation at the tribunal and agrees that the information requested is appropriately withheld. Therefore the council is right to support its approach and continue to support the tribunal in reaching its final decision. Thank you Madam Mayor.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Madam Mayor the reality is there is now a cultural of secrecy that surrounds the council that is getting worse and is frankly quite appalling. The freedom of information requests are routinely refused, enquiries from the media go unanswered. Members and members of the public refused the right to submit questions this evening. None of this is conducive to good governance and to good decision making. So will the leader agree to establish a cross party review to improve the openness and transparency of Thurrock Council.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent yes that it quite a wide ranging of answer from the original question about a freedom of information request. The council is within its rights and within the law to refuse freedom of information requests on a number of reasons that could be the length of time it would take to respond, whether it's commercially confidential or whether it identifies an individual and so on. We could be here for some time going through all of them. Equally for

members and indeed for members of the public to ask questions that is governed by the constitution, there is a constitutional working group that will be kicking off very shortly and I know the deputy mayor will be attending and it will for there whether to decide to change the ability for those questions to be asked and be put before the council.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

No thank you.

2. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Gledhill

Councillor J Kent

Cabinet has agreed that 500 FTE posts will be cut over the next two years to save money. Given a number of these will be vacant posts, how many people currently employed by Thurrock Council does the Leader estimate will lose their jobs as a result of this?

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. The 500 full time equivalent reduction statement is based on an estimate using the average council salary with on costs of £40,000 and assuming £20M reduction in costs against the General Fund that equates to the 500. Quoted. Actual staff reductions will depend on a sufficient number of factors. So first of all alternative funding sources found, maximising capital and other grant funding to paid for rather than it being paid for from the general fund. Decisions about service delivery models and other efficiencies and opportunities for reducing costs. Of the 500 posts that potentially could be reduced over the next two years we believe it is going to be over 200 full time equivalents which will be achieved through vacant posts which you referred to briefly in your question. Additionally we can expect further natural staff turnover to increase the number of those vacancies. This potentially results in around somewhere between 250 and 300 full time staff equivalents that could and say again could see being cut. That is of course assuming that the savings are not identified from other sources and if they are not redeployed from other jobs and if and as I have said before if the costs are found through other income streams and there will also be other employment opportunities that may arise as the borough evolves. Indeed we heard from Councillor Maney earlier about the increase of the size of the CEOs. The impact of any reductions on services will be mitigated through the transformation and reform of the Council as we create a modern organisation that can deliver the increasingly exciting agenda and improve outcomes for the

borough and its residents. Maximising our use of digital and technical solutions will be key to this and ensure we maintain crucial services that protect the most vulnerable. As we know Thurrock Council needs evolve and it will evolve unfortunately that will mean a reduction in staff.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Thank you Madam Mayor and these are incredibly sensitive issues and I know from past experience that having to lose staff and having to make them redundant is something that nobody here wants to do and in any way do I diminish the toughness of the decision. It is also unfortunate that very often you can't always make the savings or make the job cuts in the areas that you would most likely to be able to. So can the leader of the council tell us whether he has made any assessment at all of which areas of the council are most vulnerable to job losses.

Mayor

Councillor Gledhill

Councillor Gledhill

Thank you Councillor Kent for number one for your understanding of this position obviously you were in a similar position a number of years ago but also for the sensitivity towards those staff who may be losing their work and their employment with Thurrock Council. The assessments will go forward, and we've already seen Councillor Jefferies who is directly in front of me, submit a report with a number of the street cleaning operatives will be reduced but we will be doing everything we can to maximise the services provided to residents so can I point to one particularly team or another particular team no I can't nor should I. But what I can assure you is that it will be done as fairly as possible and following emails from another leader it will start from the top all the way down to the bottom. Thank you.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

No thank you.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO CABINET MEMBERS, COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND MEMBERS APPOINTED TO REPRESENT THE COUNCIL ON A JOINT COMMITTEE

1. From Councillor Holloway to Councillor Maney

Councillor Holloway's question fell due to apologies being received and a written respond would be provided.

2. From Councillor Muldowney to Councillor Maney

Councillor Muldowney

Will the Council consider traffic calming measures to combat speeding and dangerous driving on Heath Road, Chadwell St Mary?

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Muldowney for your question. As we have heard Councillor Muldowney has asked whether the council would consider calming measures in respect of Health Road in Chadwell St Mary and as I explained to Councillor Carter I am happy to say in an around way the answer is yes and the reason that it is yes because we always consider road safety across our entire road network where accident data or speed levels justifies intervention we will do. So Councillor Muldowney can rest assure that if and when and I hope that it doesn't come to this but if and when accident levels on Heath Road reach a point where we are required to intervene we will but at present Madam Mayor there has only been three personal injury accidents in Heath Road over the last five years, and this is police data, not the council data, which means that Health Road currently rates 71st out of 162 roads on our priority list so the residents of Health Road can actually rest assure that they live in a very safe road as statistics fair out but at the moment there are no plans for any engineering works but should that change the council would of course respond accordingly.

Mayor

Councillor Muldowney do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Muldowney

Yes thank you Madam Mayor. Madam Mayor residents are very concerned about the lower stretch of Health Road where the road bends to form a right angle at the junction into Orsett Health Crescent. There have been two recent incidents of cars leaving the road and ploughing into bungalows at this point it was a miracle that nobody died. Last week it was road safety week were we learnt that more people are killed or seriously injured on our roads in Essex because of road incidents compared

to any other type of crime. So this is a very serious issue that residents have a right to be concerned about. Can I ask the portfolio holder if he is not prepared to consider traffic calming at this point will he at least commit to gathering live traffic data to establish the scale of this issue before there is another serious accident.

Mayor

Councillor Maney

Councillor Maney

I might need another microphone because I think I said in my answer that we interrogate police data as of routine so we know what the data tells us, there have been three personal accidents in Heath Road over the last five years, there isn't really much more I can say to that, we do measure speed, we do measure accidents as I have just said. We wouldn't have a priority list if we didn't have that information to hand already. We don't pick them out of a hat. So I can only repeat the data is there, we use it to see which roads to prioritise and at the moment in the grand scheme of things Heath Road is a very safe road and residents should take comfort from that but at the same time we will continue to monitor the situation and if road safety deteriorates or speed levels deteriorates we will then look at that. I am sure Councillor Muldowney would not want us to prioritise Heath Road over another road where accident data was a lot higher and people are subject to danger when using that road ... *(unable to hear the remainder due to static interference)*...

Mayor

Councillor Muldowney do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Muldowney

No thank you.

3. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Coxshall

Councillor J Kent

Will the Portfolio Holder set out the plan, and target dates, for reopening each element of the Thameside Complex?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

The Thameside Theatre as this question has been some time for me to answer it has been superseded, but it is here, the Thameside Theatre is open access to staff and the council in line with the council's approach to public buildings. The library is open,

the registrar office has been operating for some time, the Thameside opened on the 7 September, the museum reopened on the 14 September.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Clearly things have moved on and most elements have re-opened although I understand the need for caution with regards to Covid but can I ask for when instance the theatre will be able to open with full capacity when most theatres across the country are already operating at full capacity. So when will Thameside move to that position and when does he envisage the library being fully opened and fully accessible rather than the system which is in place at the moment.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

Yes, I understand that the air conditioning wasn't able to be sufficient for air quality reasons at that time but I understand as of now, today, that has been corrected by a temporary air conditioning system in there so as of now I have been told that it can actually open at full capacity due to the air conditioning.

Mayor

Councillor J Kent do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor J Kent

Madam Mayor that is really good news and really good to hear. Can I ask the portfolio holder then to undertake to ensure that the council web site is updated to release further tickets for further capacity for shows immediately and especially for the pantomime as that would be a shame if that went ahead at three quarter capacity if that is now not necessary.

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

That is obviously not my department service, it is actually the building and assets but I understand the question and thank you for raising that because if that's not been done yet, it takes time to go through the council, this happened recently so that will certainly happen.

4. From Councillor J Kent to Councillor Jefferies

Councillor J Kent

For the past two years Thurrock Council has, one Saturday a month, provided a caged truck to support the Orchards Forum as they work to keep alleyways in the area as free as possible from fly tipping and other litter. Unfortunately, that support has now been withdrawn and the rubbish pulled from alleyways is left to be collected in the week. Will the Portfolio Holder reinstate the Saturday support?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor Kent for your question. I feel there needs to be some clarification here this support had never been withdrawn from the Orchards Forum. What in fact happened was the council spoke to the forum and asked them if it would be possible to collect their rubbish during the week day, this would help the service operational and this was agreed what would happen. If however if they wish for the rubbish they collected to be collected on a Saturday then as with all community groups we are happy to support and all they need to do is contact Waste.streetservices@thurrouck.gov.uk and arrangements can be made.

Mayor

Councillor Kent do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Kent

Yes I am pleased to hear that but I have to say the forum has been in touch with the council on a number of occasions to ask for the Saturday support to be reinstated but on every turn have been turned down. But I will take that back. The issue is the 30 sessions that they have held have cleared at least 40 tonnes of rubbish. With the support of the cage truck on the day they are able to move from alleyway to alleyway and clear 5 and 6 in one go. Having to leave the accumulated rubbish on a pavement means they can realistically clear only 1 or 2 so they don't keep on top of it as they wished. But I am grateful for the initial response and I will suggest they do as you have set out and copy you into it so if there is a problem you will be able to resolve it.

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor. I don't think there was a question there but yes more than happy to receive the email and sure the rubbish is collected.

Mayor

Councillor Kent do you wish to pose a secondary supplementary.

Councillor Kent

No thank you.

5. From Councillor Worrall to Councillor Huelin

Councillor Worrall

Following her very public offer to meet with groups based at the Thameside building can the portfolio holder please update the chamber what meaningful meetings she has had with the groups and what were the outcomes of these meetings.

Mayor

Councillor Huelin

Councillor Huelin

Thank you Madam Mayor and thank you Councillor for your question. Working with officers I have put in place an extensive engagement programme that is currently ongoing and will continue over the next few months as we develop a new cultural strategy for Thurrock. Anyone who has written to the council about this issue has received a response either directly myself or officers on my behalf and there has been continued engagement to keep those interested up to date. Myself, Councillor Coxshall and officers have shared information with local groups and regional stakeholders on the current status of the Thameside Complex this then gained a greater understanding of the need of get those involved to better inform the decision making, outlined our plans for developing a new culture strategy, updated on the opening of the theatre and museum and discuss how we will continue to engage over the coming months. Amongst other meetings with individuals and groups we also attended the round table meeting organised by the council's local cultural practitioners from across the sector and more meetings are being planned. At the round table meeting I reaffirmed my commitment to working collaboratively with individuals and groups on the opportunities to improve arts, culture and heritage for Thurrock residents and the development of ideas and actions to inform the new cultural strategy.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Worrall

Yes I do, thank you Madam Mayor. I am just not prepared that you have done all that stuff when I know that many many residents are emailing in saying they have not

received a response from you or officers which kind of upset me. I want to talk about those round table meetings, you had your first round table meeting on the 22 September with the Heritage, Library and Arts Groups and it was agreed that a series of meetings would be held to find a suitable solution on the proposal of the closure of Thameside Theatre. Unfortunately, I understand, that due to the sad death of Sir David Amess the second meeting was cancelled and is now due to take place on the 30 November, but last week at the corporate overview and scrutiny committee the head of finance informed the committee that the decision on the future of Thameside committees was due to be tabled by cabinet on the 8 December. If that timetable is followed there really is no time for these meaningful meetings to take place and the cabinet report include in the decision will be printed in the same week that the meeting is scheduled to take place. Can you assure all those groups that you have been speaking to and those groups that you met at the round table that you will delay any cabinet decision on the closure of Thameside until all of those meetings have taken place.

Mayor

Councillor Huelin

Councillor Huelin

Short answer to that one. Thank you for your question. Yes. It is not appropriate to do now, so yes.

Mayor

Councillor Worrall do you wish to pose a second supplementary question.

Councillor Worrall

Thank you for that. I am sure that will assure people here that we can plan for Thameside in the future maybe.

Councillor Huelin

Totally agree, it was wrong and has already been decided.

Councillor Worrall

Its definitely been decided. Off the table?

Councillor Huelin

Yes.

Councillor Worrall

Thank you for that. This is always going to be on going, a budget problem, we know there is going to be a budget problem and over the recent weeks I have been

following all the stuff around the different theatres and seeing across the country, so many theatres have received a substantial amount, millions of money, for refurbishments and running costs and thinking how are they getting that. It is really difficult for the council to bid for that money and get it. The ones that are getting it are the ones that are in community ownership. It's about that asset transfer, they can get much much more money than we as a council can get. So if we are going to get a new theatre that is amazing as this was what was promised that the theatre would not shut until we got one but what I don't want to do in next year, two years, three years, five years were here fighting again. I really think Thameside theatre belongs in the hands of the community and we do need to do that asset transfer. They will run to much better than us so do you agree that is a good place for our theatre to sit.

Mayor

Councillor Huelin

Councillor Huelin

Thank you councillor for your question. Yes that was one of the reasons why we were both agreeing and saying we have said we would like communities to come forward with an interest in it. So yes community can take things forward obviously it needs to be as viable as any other option there but if it is viable we are willing to talk about it. We have always said we would do that.

Councillor Worrall

Yes but it needs some support from this council and I'm sure they will make a better job of it.

Councillor Huelin

Just like you we don't want to be in this position in five years where we don't have a theatre service.

Councillor Worrall

Absolutely.

6. From Councillor Worrall to Councillor Maney

Councillor Worrall received a written response.

7. From Councillor Redsell to Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Redsell

Would the portfolio confirm that there is still no plans to relocate the Gammon field travellers' site to Long Lane, as part of Highways England Lower Thames Crossing project?

Mayor

Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Coxshall

I can confirm there are no plans to relocate the site much further than as originally designed by Highways England now called National Highways. In fact I would like to thank yourself and Councillor Maney for the hard work that they had put in with National Highways then Highways England and without that I believe they would never have got this result that is substantially proven to your ward and to thank them both for the meetings they had with Highways England which are a difficult organisation to see sense.

Mayor

Councillor Redsell do you wish to pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Redsell

No thank you.

8. From Councillor Polley to Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Polley received a written response.

9. From Councillor Kerin to Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Kerin

Does the Portfolio Holder support the call of the Grays Riverside councillors for Parker Road Recreational Park to be given official Green Space Designation?

Mayor

Councillor Jefferies

Councillor Jefferies

Thank you Madam Mayor. A very long meeting so will keep it short. Yes.

Mayor

Councillor Kerin do you wish pose a supplementary question.

Councillor Kerin

Because I liked the response, I am going to keep it short so thank you.

10. From Councillor Fletcher to Councillor Coxshall

Councillor Fletcher received a written response.